



# NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND  
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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## **NOAA Reminds Hawaii Ocean Users to Follow Whale Protection Rules** *First whale of the season spotted in Honaunau Bay*

With the first confirmed sighting this week of a humpback whale in waters off the Big Island, NOAA is reminding boaters and other ocean users to keep a safe distance from these annual visitors to Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary.

Endangered humpback whales are protected in Hawai'i. Federal regulations prohibit approaching within 100 yards of whales when on the water, and 1,000 feet when operating an aircraft. These and other regulations apply to all ocean users, including vessel operators, kayakers, paddle boarders, windsurfers, swimmers and divers throughout the Hawaiian Islands.

"It's important for everyone to be extra vigilant during whale season, for their own safety and the protection of these magnificent animals," said Paul Wong, operations coordinator, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary.

Humpback whale season in Hawai'i generally runs from November through May, although whales may be encountered in limited numbers during other months. As many as 12,000 humpback whales winter in Hawaiian waters each year.

The whales attract wildlife enthusiasts, but they also pose safety hazards to ocean users when the 45-ton marine mammals surface, breach or slap their massive tails or flippers. Vessel-whale collisions can also result in death or injury to boaters and whales.

On Monday, Sea Quest tour operator Captain Tony Roensch witnessed two tail slaps from a humpback whale yearling in Honaunau Bay, the first confirmed whale sighting in the sanctuary this season. Whale calves are vulnerable to vessel strikes because they are difficult to see as they rest just under the surface. Young whales also must surface more frequently.

Ed Lyman, marine mammal response manager for the sanctuary, said people like Roensch are a "great resource" in helping monitor humpback whales in the sanctuary.

"By locating distressed animals, reporting and providing the initial documentation and assessment on the animal, ocean users are the foundation of our conservation efforts," Lyman said.

If you come across an injured or entangled marine mammal, please maintain the required safe distance and call the NOAA Marine Mammal Hotline at 1-888-256-9840 immediately, or the U.S. Coast Guard on channel 16. If reporting a suspected approach zone violation, please call the NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Hotline at 1-800-853-1964. Additional guidelines and safety tips can be found at <http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>.

Hawaiian Island Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary is administered jointly by a partnership of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources. The sanctuary works to protect humpback whales through research, education, conservation and stewardship.

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and our other [social media channels](#).